

**Programs Serving Transition-Age Youth:  
A Comparative Analysis of the U.S. and 10 Other  
Countries in the Organisation for Economic  
Co-Operation and Development (OECD)**

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February 2014

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## **ABSTRACT**

This report summarizes policies and programs of 10 countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) that aim to improve the transition of youth with disabilities to appropriate and gainful employment. Although the evidence of whether these policies and programs are effective is missing in most cases, they have the potential to offer promising ideas for implementation or testing by the United States. Several themes emerged from our review. First, countries have engaged in a range of efforts to promote employment, such as offering financial incentives to workers with disabilities and expanding employer supports. Second, investment in large-scale pilot projects has helped governments to identify what works in their countries. Third, most countries are operating programs at various government levels that are designed to improve access to adult services for people with disabilities (such as consolidating supports, improving the coordination of benefits and services, and promoting automatic eligibility for or access to programs). Finally, all countries have actively pursued solutions (such as increasing linkages to postsecondary education and increasing vocational supports) to the problem of inadequate coordination of youth and adult services. The numerous initiatives reviewed emphasize the importance of a more detailed examination of the process by which programs and policies originated or about the effectiveness of the most promising components. As the next stage of this study, we will conduct case studies on Germany and the Netherlands to provide an in-depth review of the systems for supporting youth with disabilities and facilitating their transition to gainful employment.

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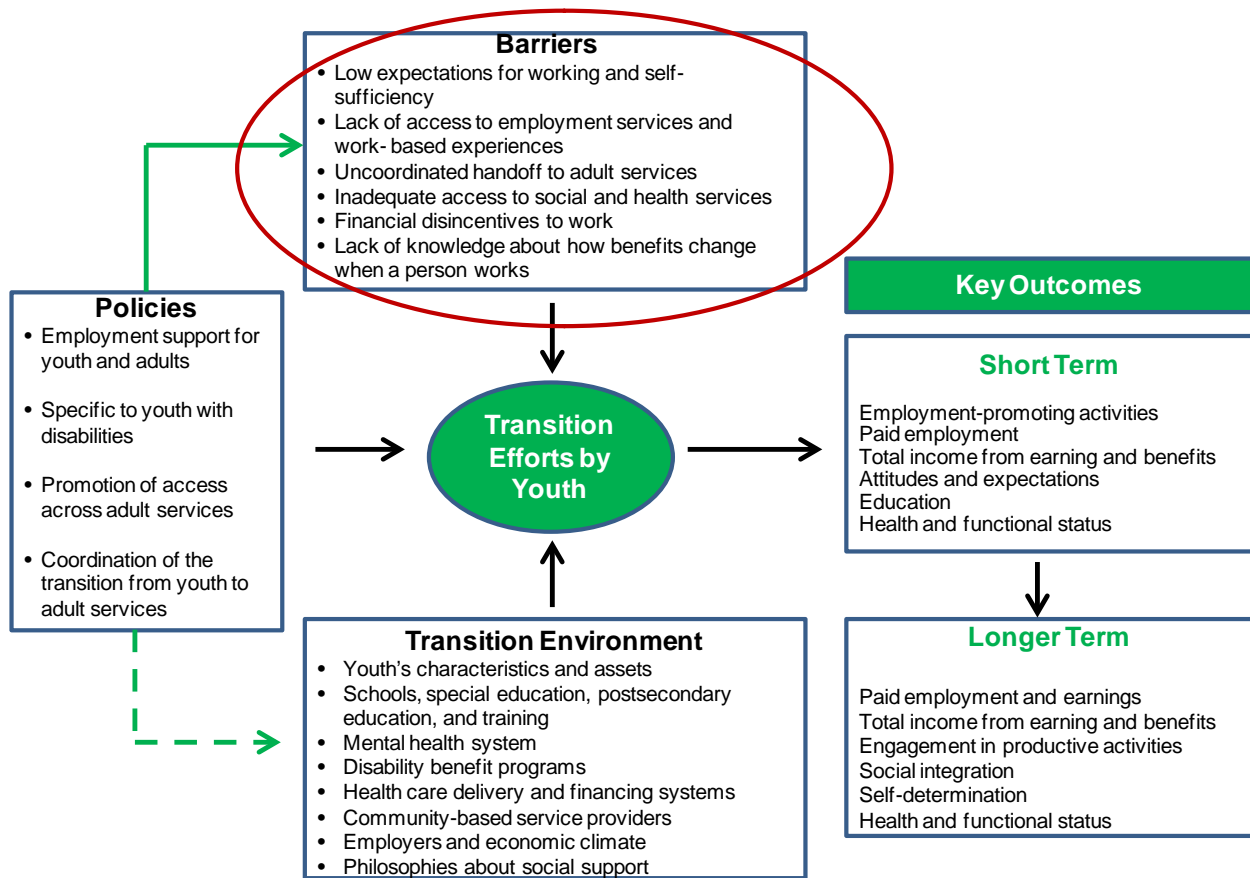
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes policies and programs of 10 countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), as well as the United States, that aim to improve the transition of youth with disabilities to appropriate and gainful employment. Although the evidence of whether these policies and programs are effective is missing in most cases, they have the potential to offer promising ideas for implementation or testing by the United States. To conduct this study, we reviewed the literature available for Australia, Canada, and 8 European countries: Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

### Promising International Policies That Address the Limitations of the U.S. System

To guide our review of the literature, we adopted a conceptual framework for identifying promising policies for addressing the barriers shown in Figure ES.1. We classify the policies into four categories. For each category, we summarize the gaps in knowledge about these policies and the lessons that are most likely to benefit the United States.

**Figure ES.1. Conceptual Framework for Policies and Programs Serving Transition-Age Youth**



## **Policies Promoting Employment for People with Disabilities**

Both the United States and the other 10 OECD countries in this study have implemented numerous initiatives to link youth and adults with disabilities to employment supports. Our review of the evidence from the countries in this study revealed a wide range of efforts to promote employment in the following areas: the transition from sheltered to supported employment, the financial incentives offered to workers with disabilities as well as those tied to vocational training, and expanded employer supports.

Despite a growing consensus on the effectiveness of these employment supports and the promise of many of these international efforts to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities, it is unclear whether the U.S. social welfare system can adapt or build on them.

## **Policies Targeted to Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities**

The United States has a paucity of programs and policies that focus on youth and young adults. Although the Social Security Administration (SSA) has supported pilot studies that involve this population, most of these have been small in scale. Furthermore, there is limited evidence about the effectiveness of these pilots.

Our literature review revealed that, in some of the countries included in this study, investment in large-scale pilot projects has helped government agencies to identify what works for employers as well as youth who are able to work, those who are in school, and those who only receive benefits. Furthermore, there are efforts to provide income support and income supplements specifically for youth in vocational programs. The lessons from several European countries that are developing and implementing national schemes to serve youth with disabilities could be valuable to the United States, though evaluations of the initiatives identified in our review are scant or inaccessible.

## **Policies to Promote Access to Adult Services for People with Disabilities**

One of the most challenging aspects of the policies to promote access to adult services for people with disabilities in the United States is the lack of effective coordination across multiple government levels (national, state, and local). In addition, given the limited evidence regarding the effectiveness of these policies, it is unclear whether the uncoordinated initiatives that are in place actually improve the outcomes of youth with disabilities who are transitioning to adult services.

Most of the OECD countries in this study are operating programs at various levels of government that have been designed to improve access to adult services for people with disabilities. These efforts have centered on consolidating supports; improving the coordination of benefits and services, typically under the oversight of a single agency; promoting automatic eligibility for or access to programs and services; and developing systems for monitoring the performance of local services. Although the idea that central coordination of benefits and services for people with disabilities could address the fragmentation and limited coordination of programs in the United States is appealing, many aspects about how these programs achieve their goals are unknown.

## **Policies Promoting Coordination of the Transition from Youth to Adult Services for People with Disabilities**

In addition to the limited coordination of services of programs targeted to youth and young adults, there also is poor coordination of programs promoting the transition from youth to adult services for people with disabilities in the United States. This issue is particularly salient for youth who either do not receive transitional services in secondary school programs or cannot benefit from the mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

All of the OECD countries in our review have actively pursued solutions to the problem of inadequate coordination of youth and adult services. Several of them have increased linkages to postsecondary education, increased vocational supports, and revised age requirements for gaining eligibility for disability benefits so that there is a continuum between youth and adult services. Despite the multiple coordinating efforts that the OECD countries have implemented, there are no far-reaching solutions to improve youth-to-adult transitions.

### **Countries with Promising Programs and Interventions for In-Depth Case Study**

Our literature review revealed that all of the 10 selected OECD countries have made important progress in developing transition options for youth with disabilities. In particular, the numerous initiatives that the selected 10 OECD countries have developed and implemented over the past 30 years emphasize the importance of a detailed examination of the process by which programs and policies for achieving these goals originated or the effectiveness of the most promising components.

To determine how these policies could be instructive to the United States, we need to learn more about why and how these countries took the paths they have followed. Therefore, in spring 2013, we conducted in-depth reviews of the systems for supporting youth with disabilities and facilitating their transition to gainful employment, focusing on Germany and the Netherlands. A forthcoming report will feature selected programs in both countries, relying on expert input and further review of the supplementary materials.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

For more than 80 years, the United States has built a social welfare system to address the needs of people with disabilities, among other relevant populations. This system has evolved in focus and scale, aiming to deliver efficient and effective services to people with disabilities. Despite these major efforts, the system faces significant issues in promoting the transition of youth with disabilities, particularly with increasing the employment outcomes of this population. Youth with disabilities represent a large portion of transition-age youth; the prevalence of disability for youth ages 16 to 24 ranges from 5 to 13 percent, depending on the survey and questions used to identify such youth (Honeycutt and Wittenburg 2012).

Although the transition from youth to adulthood can be difficult for many young adults, youth with disabilities face additional barriers in social, educational, and vocational transitions because of their health conditions and poor human capital development (Osgood et al. 2010). Despite strides in increasing their educational attainment, youth with disabilities continue to complete high school at lower rates than their peers without disabilities, and fewer youth with disabilities continue on to postsecondary education (Newman et al. 2011; Wagner et al. 2005). Employment rates for youth and young adults with disabilities continue to deteriorate, extending a long-term trend (Houtenville and Daly 2003). These patterns suggest that human capital development continues to be a challenge for this population, despite the fact that interventions to promote education and employment at this early stage could have long-term economic advantages (O'Day and Stapleton 2009; Rangarajan et al. 2009).

The system of supports for people with disabilities can help youth transition to adulthood, but youth and their families who navigate the U.S. system encounter many barriers. Youth need access to a diverse array of services—education (both secondary and postsecondary); vocational supports; income supports; health insurance coverage; health care; transportation; life skills; and housing—that are interdisciplinary in nature and have varied funding streams and administrative oversight. Below, we discuss barriers that youth and their families may find inhibit their access to various transition supports (Luecking and Wittenburg 2009; Wittenburg et al. 2002).

### A. Insufficient Employment Supports

Linking youth to vocational supports—particularly work-based activities—is generally associated with later successful employment outcomes (Carter et al. 2010; Joshi et al. 2012; Shandra and Hogan 2008). Summaries of best practices for youth, such as *Guideposts for Success* from the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWDY), include career preparation and work-based experiences as a critical component of transition success (NCWDY 2005). The Social Security Administration's (SSA's) Youth Transition Demonstration (YTD), whose interventions were based on the NCWDY model, emphasized work-based experiences, and early results from the evaluation have been positive for three of the six projects (Fraker 2013).

Despite the consensus of the effectiveness of vocational supports, youth with disabilities may have limited connections to such supports in high school and beyond. Schools that have programs to provide strong vocational services to youth may be able to serve only a small portion of the youth who would benefit from these services (Carter et al. 2010). Specialized vocational programs, such as Project Search, tend to be in select communities and have limited capacities to serve youth. State vocational rehabilitation agencies are often the first or only option for youth to obtain vocational services after high school, but these agencies vary in the extent to which they serve transition-age

youth, their services are often limited because of resource constraints, and youth may encounter sizeable wait lists for services. Relatively few youth with disabilities ages 14 to 24—about 3 percent—exit services from vocational rehabilitation agencies in a given year (Stapleton et al. 2010), suggesting that this option may not be used by many youth.

Upon graduating from high school, youth with special needs may find that they do not have the skills or background to find employment on their own. Those who do acquire jobs may benefit from additional supports to help them maintain employment, though they may not know about these services. Employers may also be limited in accessing supports for their employees, in terms of receiving assistance for accommodations, obtaining knowledge about how to work with those with disabilities, and understanding how laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act affect them. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) operates One-Stop programs at the local level to serve as centers for employment-related activities for job seekers, employees, and employers. To facilitate outcomes for people with disabilities, DOL has funded the Disability Employment Initiative and Disability Program Navigator positions (co-funded with SSA) in many One-Stop centers. In addition, employers can receive a work opportunity tax credit when they hire individuals from some vocational rehabilitation programs or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients, offsetting their tax burden at a rate proportional to wages paid to such workers in their first year of employment.

The federal government supports direct employment of people with disabilities through its AbilityOne program. Specifically, it requires federal agencies to contract with community programs, for which at least 75 percent of labor hours are provided by individuals with significant disabilities, when the programs can provide the services or products required by the agency. Though these programs sometimes include sheltered work environments, they also include more technologically oriented jobs (involving call centers and technical support) and offer rehabilitation and other supports for their workers.

Many youth with disabilities receive disability benefits, either SSI (a means-tested program) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), when their health conditions limit or prevent employment. Youth receiving these benefits are offered incentives to encourage work, such as income exclusions for work-related expenses, as well as potential access to vocational rehabilitation services through state vocational rehabilitation agencies or employment networks (through SSA's Ticket to Work program).

## **B. Few Services Specifically Targeted to the Needs of Youth and Young Adults**

The United States has few national programs that are specifically targeted to youth and young adults with disabilities. Youth eligible for SSI benefits because of a disability face a redetermination decision at age 18, when they are evaluated against adult criteria (having a condition that limits or prevents employment). The SSI benefit program for young adults is the same as that for older adults; though there are some targeted work incentives for students, the work incentives for SSI are generally not well understood or used. Vocational rehabilitation agencies are tasked with providing vocational services to help secondary school youth in the transition to work, but often do not begin providing services until after high school completion. Although some agencies have counselors who specialize in serving youth, many do not, though the vocational needs of transitioning youth with disabilities may be very different than those of experienced workers who seek vocational assistance because of a late-onset disability.

There are a variety of small programs in the United States for vocational services—such as the Bridges program or Project Search—but they tend to serve a very small number of youth in few



locations, and their effectiveness has not been sufficiently evaluated. Similarly, youth who pursue postsecondary education programs could benefit from in-school supports, but they must seek out and ask for those supports (as opposed to high school, where the institution is required to provide supports for those who need them).

### **C. Issues with Access to Adult Services**

In the United States, youth with disabilities face multiple barriers in accessing adult services. Compared to the services youth receive in secondary school, which are largely delivered through the school, the adult service landscape is fragmented. Service agencies and benefit programs have different and varied eligibility requirements for service receipt. Although access to vocational rehabilitation is cited as a benefit for SSI and SSDI beneficiaries, for example, such access is not guaranteed, as the state vocational rehabilitation agency can declare a beneficiary ineligible for services or place such applicants on waiting lists for services. DOL's Disability Program Navigator program was intended to inform individuals with disabilities about relevant services, programs, and incentives. Accessing multiple services can involve overcoming transportation barriers, particularly as providers may not be co-located. Lack of coordination may also be an issue, if providers are unaware of one another's involvement in serving a particular youth. Agencies may have conflicting service objectives—for example, youth with SSI benefits lose a portion of their cash benefits if they work; if they seek vocational services, their employment goal might be in conflict (at least initially) with the receipt of cash benefits. Further, providers have no incentive to coordinate services, as their funding streams likely do not pay for coordination efforts. Funding may also be insufficient to serve all youth who would benefit from services, it may be narrowly focused, and it may come from national, state, or local sources. As a result of these issues, connections to adult services are often uncoordinated for youth with disabilities.

### **D. Insufficient Coordination of the Transition from Youth to Adult Services**

The United States has a strong system for promoting adult service access for youth with disabilities in high school. Youth with disabilities enrolled in secondary school who receive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are required to have a transition plan, often in coordination with staff from the local vocational rehabilitation agency or other community providers, to help the youth and their families receive services after high school (Aron and Loprest 2012; Wittenburg et al. 2002). Yet, despite this initiative, several gaps exist for U.S. youth:

- Many youth with disabilities may not fall under IDEA (for instance, they may drop out of secondary school or the school may not be aware of the youth's disability) and so may not receive transitional services in secondary school programs.
- The extent to which these plans are successful may vary from state to state and locality to locality, depending on whether (1) local providers have resources to deliver services and are involved in the transition planning process with the youth and school officials and (2) the youth's needs are accurately documented in the plan itself.
- For youth who leave high school (either because of completion or dropping out), or are ineligible for secondary school transition planning, no single community agency is responsible for facilitating the transition process; these youth and their families are on their own for the transition process or must depend on finding a service provider to help.

- Youth with disabilities who receive SSI have to go through a redetermination process at age 18; many will not meet the adult definition of SSI (having a condition that limits or prevents employment), so their income and health supports will be terminated, along with their access to other programs that require disability benefit receipt for eligibility.
- Continuity between youth and adult services might be disrupted for a variety of reasons. These include difficulty identifying the right program across multiple transition providers, differing staff perceptions among providers, providers that do not focus on youth, varying eligibility criteria across programs, differences in the service population of providers, delays in accessing services, and lack of funding to serve all eligible youth (Davis 2003; U.S. Government Accountability Office 2012).

Aware of these barriers to delivering more efficient and effective services for disabled youth, SSA and other stakeholders have designed, funded, implemented, and evaluated several important pilot programs to address the barriers and gaps listed above. For instance, SSA's Youth Transition Demonstration (YTD) delivered a range of work-based experiences and other supports to youth receiving disability benefits (or at risk of receiving benefits) to address many of these barriers, with positive early results for service receipt but mixed results for paid employment experiences (Fraker 2011). SSA has also implemented its Ticket to Work program to increase the involvement of private providers in delivering vocational services to federal disability beneficiaries (for all beneficiaries, not just for youth and young adults), and offers a special earned income exclusion for SSI beneficiaries who are in school. While younger beneficiaries have tended to be more likely to use the Ticket program, and there is clear evidence of an increase in service enrollment by young beneficiaries, so far there have been no measurable effects on employment, earnings and benefit receipt (Livermore and Stapleton 2010). Youth with disabilities who receive vocational rehabilitation services can have their postsecondary education paid for by the vocational rehabilitation agency, provided the education program is consistent with the youth's employment goals. Finally, an upcoming demonstration, PROMISE, which will be funded by the U.S. Department of Education and SSA, will attempt to address some of the larger issues in system coordination and funding.

## E. Report Objectives

This report examines the experiences of 10 OECD countries (Australia, Canada, and eight European countries: Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom), in addition to the United States, in their attempts to address these four core barriers. Their experiences can help inform future policy directions for the United States across the local, state, or national levels. Though these countries have different philosophies regarding benefit programs and supports than the U.S.—for instance, many provide more comprehensive income supports than the U.S.—they face many of the same issues. The employment rates and education levels of young adults with disabilities lag behind those of their peers without disabilities; the proportion of young adults receiving disability benefits is on the rise, and policymakers face increasing pressure to find ways to promote the independence of people with disabilities. The solutions to these problems in other countries may therefore have relevance for the U.S. experience, either in suggesting new approaches or identifying paths to avoid.

This report is the culmination of the initial research phase of a project whose goal is to identify relevant international lessons for the United States. The project seeks answers to five questions designed to support U.S. efforts to identify strategies for serving transition-age youth with disabilities:

1. What supported employment and vocational programs do the selected countries have to assist transition-age youth with disabilities in promoting long-term outcomes, particularly employment?
2. How are the benefit and vocational programs integrated with one another?
3. Are there evidence-based practices that promote independent living outcomes for youth with disabilities?
4. What reforms to those programs have been implemented recently (within the past 10 to 20 years) and to what effect?
5. Which international programs, innovations, and reforms have the greatest potential to inform U.S. programs (such as those run by SSA and state vocational rehabilitation agencies) that assist youth with disabilities?

The current study represents a first step in this process by presenting findings from a literature review to provide an initial answer to these questions. This information is not intended to be comprehensive, but to provide a broad overview of how countries are approaching the issue of addressing the needs of youth and young adults with disabilities. Often, the literature is incomplete and lacks details about how a program works, the populations it serves, how it functions, and its effects on transitions. We will continue our research by pursuing an in-depth study of countries with promising policies and programs, selecting one or two countries for further case study.

This report is organized as follows. In Chapter II, we review our method for the analysis, presenting our overarching framework, the analytic strategy for including countries, and literature review process. The following four chapters present policies to promote employment (Chapter III), programs and policies targeted to youth and young adults (Chapter IV), policies to promote access to adult services (Chapter V), and policies to promote youth transitions to adult services (Chapter VI). Each of these chapters is structured similarly, with a brief description of the issues and barriers, a summary table listing the initiatives enacted by each country, and a narrative that identifies the broad themes of the solutions across countries. In the final chapter, we conclude by suggesting promising programs, the gaps in our knowledge about these programs, and countries proposed for further study.

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## II. METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach for this study is an in-depth literature review of the broad range of programs and policies that the United States and 10 other OECD countries are using to support the transition of youth with disabilities to adulthood. To ensure that this review focuses on the right components of these programs and policies, we adopted a conceptual framework to guide our review. This chapter is divided in two sections. First, we describe the conceptual framework. Second, we summarize the steps we followed to identify the relevant information for our study.

### A. Conceptual Framework

Although youth with disabilities possess many skills and strengths, they also face many challenges that make their transition to adulthood uniquely difficult and less likely to be successful if not carefully addressed. These barriers include youths' low expectations for work and self-sufficiency, lack of access to employment support services or work experience, lack of coordination from youth to adult services, poor access to social or health services, disincentives to work when receiving income support, and lack of knowledge about how employment influences their benefits.

With this in mind, we adapted the conceptual framework for the present study from the framework used for the YTD (Fraker and Rangarajan 2009). This framework also focused on the barriers facing transition-age youth with disabilities and the current U.S. transition environment; it also identified key outcomes for this population. Our conceptual framework is presented in Figure II.1, which highlights the types of program interventions and policies that help youth with disabilities to overcome barriers to a successful transition to adulthood in the short term and long term. This framework identifies the four policy areas we focused on in the literature review, as described in the following section.

### B. Review Approach and Synthesis

Through our literature review, we examined international policies and programs in order to identify potential lessons for the United States regarding policies and programs for improving the coordination of services for transition-age youth with disabilities.

Our analytical strategy comprised three stages. First, the study required including countries for review that had the most promise for offering lessons on serving youth with disabilities. We began by considering all OECD countries as a starting point because of the availability of information and the likelihood that they have relevant programs for youth. From this list, we identified 10 countries, in addition to the United States, based on the presence of well-developed benefits and rehabilitation programs that are similar to those of the United States. This factor was important because we were interested in identifying alternatives to U.S. approaches. We included the United States in this list in order to provide a point of comparison.

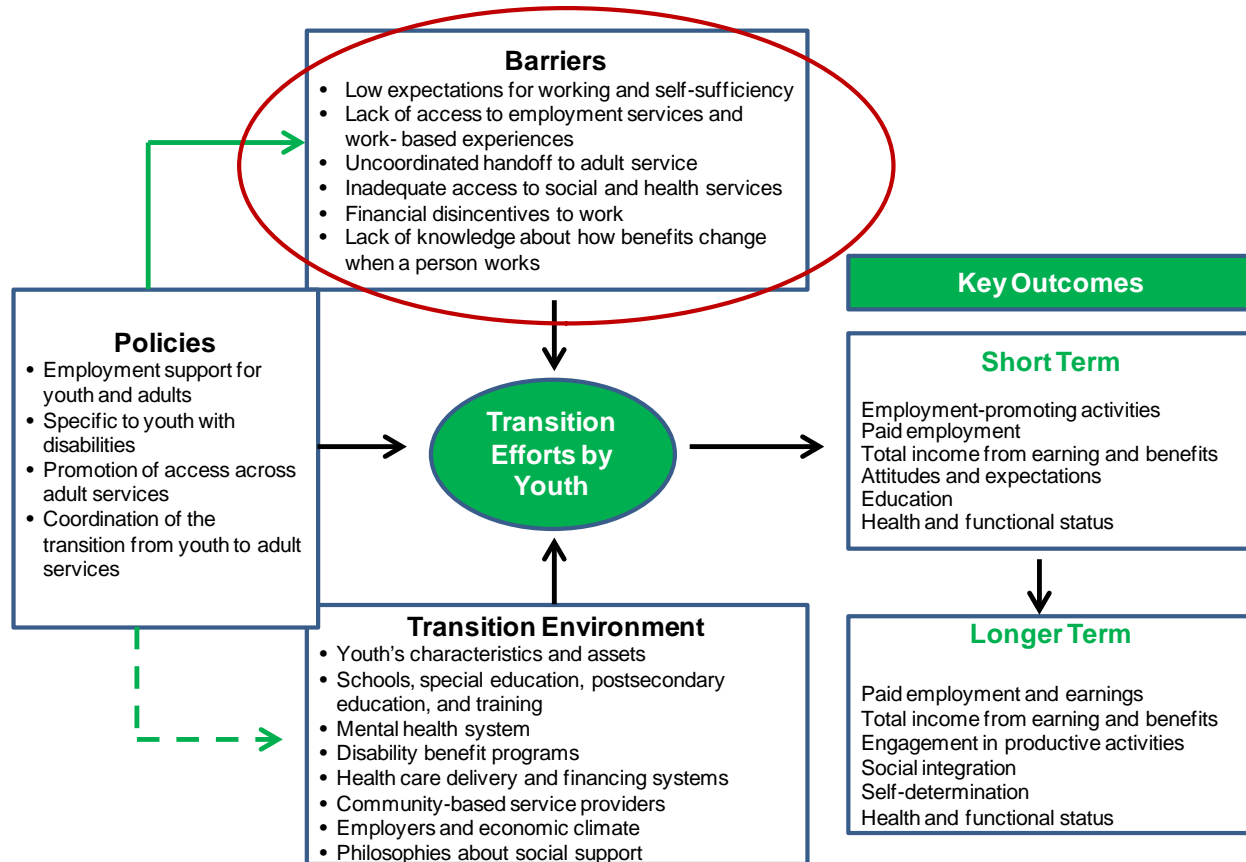
Second, we reviewed published literature and government publications for each country to compile evidence. We focused on two primary types of programs: (1) income support and (2) vocational rehabilitation. For each country, we consulted government agency websites for program information and statistics. We reviewed OECD publications that focus on cross-country comparisons of specific types of programs for people with disabilities and transitions from youth to adult services, primarily from school to work. In addition, we consulted country-specific monographs that were prepared by the OECD and other international organizations. Finally, we

reviewed specialized journals and followed up on the references cited in evaluation studies of demonstrations of initiatives for youth with disabilities to gain independence. Sources used to inform the analysis are listed in the appendix.

Third, we synthesized the evidence from the detailed lists of country programs to identify the policies that were most relevant to the aims of this study. In general, we identified programs and policies to promote independence, specifically employment, among program participants not in education, employment, or training (NEET), and develop successful linkages among programs to coordinate targeting of, access to, and transitioning from youth to adult services. We developed a template in table form that we used to organize the material in each country in four areas: (1) policies promoting employment for people with disabilities, (2) programs and policies targeted to youth and young adults with disabilities, (3) policies promoting access to adult services for people with disabilities; and (4) policies promoting coordination of the transition from youth to adult services for people with disabilities.

In the next four chapters, we discuss in detail each of the four areas listed above.

**Figure II.1. Conceptual Framework for Policies and Programs Serving Transition-Age Youth**



### III. POLICIES PROMOTING EMPLOYMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

This chapter describes the efforts of countries to promote the employment of people with disabilities, including access to vocational services and supports. Depending upon their eligibility criteria, these policies may result in the employment of transition-age youth. These policies include vocational schemes, financial incentives, and wage incentives targeted to both individuals and employers. Table III.1 summarizes the experiences of the 10 countries under review. We document the key themes below.

**Table III.1. Policies Promoting Employment for People with Disabilities, by Country**

Country	Policies
Australia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provides funding for supported employment and offers a range of employment support services through a national agency</li> <li>2. Funds service providers to assist job seekers with disabilities in obtaining employment in the open labor market</li> <li>3. Offers subsidized employment for disability-support pension beneficiaries</li> <li>4. Allows employers to pay productivity-based wages to individuals with decreased work capacity as a result of disability; the government only provides funds for the work capacity assessment</li> <li>5. Offers wage subsidies to employers who employ disability-employment services participants; the program also offers payments to participants who obtain employment directly related to vocational training within 12 months</li> <li>6. Ties various income supports for individuals to vocational training</li> </ol>
Canada	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Instituted a fund that finances employment support projects (that is, skills training, work experiences, employer awareness trainings), and subsidizes the wages of workers with disabilities</li> <li>2. Offers funding to provinces that are responsible for designing and delivering employment programs that focus on education/training, employment, building knowledge, and connecting employers to persons with disabilities</li> <li>3. Administers vocational rehabilitation program for disability beneficiaries through the disability pension program</li> </ol>
Denmark	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Offers different levels of supported and subsidized employment depending on a person's level of disability; subsidizes wages or provides income support through pension scheme (for example, reduced-duty jobs with payment subsidy or sheltered employment)</li> <li>2. Empowers rehabilitation program to provide financial assistance and training, thereby helping beneficiary maintain connection to employment in current or new job</li> <li>3. Provides various subsidies to employers to hire people with disabilities and provide the assistance or equipment they need to work</li> <li>4. Offers flexible jobs to individuals with significantly reduced work capacity who require reduced work hours, a slower work pace, or frequent breaks; wages are subsidized at a graduated rate based on the extent of their reduced capacity</li> <li>5. Helps recent graduates find employment through the Icebreaker program, which provides financial support to companies that hire people with disabilities</li> <li>6. Offers financial assistance to companies or educational institutions to provide mentors to train and guide employees with disabilities</li> </ol>
France	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Requires employers to take appropriate action to enable workers with disabilities to find or retain a job; for large employers, at least 6 percent of their workforce should be people with disabilities to avoid financial penalties</li> <li>2. Offers practical work assignments and paths to postsecondary education or combines schooling with medical support targeted specifically to people with disabilities through vocational training centers</li> </ol>

Table III.1. (continued)

Country	Policies
Germany	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Offers various income supports for individuals receiving vocational training</li> <li>2. Engages in extensive use of vouchers (also called self-budget programs) to promote human capital of hard-to-employ individuals</li> <li>3. Offers employer wage subsidies</li> <li>4. Provides targeted employment supports through special integration office (to coordinate services) and supported employment programs</li> <li>5. Requires employers with at least 20 workers to employ individuals with disabilities as 5 percent of workers</li> </ol>
Ireland	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Offers awareness training support (through grants) to companies that are interested in retaining or employing people with disabilities (disability awareness training support scheme)</li> <li>2. Compensates employers for hiring people with disabilities (through its wage subsidy scheme)</li> <li>3. Contracts with specialist training providers (STPs) to provide vocational training, special equipment, and other supports to people with severe disabilities (through the training and employment authority)</li> <li>4. Offers supported employment to people with disabilities, including access to a job coach</li> <li>5. Provides education and training to unemployed beneficiaries with income support (such as disability allowance), operated through vocation education committees</li> <li>6. Offers work incentive to beneficiaries of disability income support (disability allowance) to keep earnings for a period while attempting work</li> <li>7. Piloted program to address the high levels of unemployment among young people with disabilities</li> </ol>
The Netherlands	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Offers incentives for employers who hire individuals receiving public benefits (such as wage subsidies and reduced social insurance premiums)</li> <li>2. Provides wage supplements for beneficiaries who work to maintain a minimum living standard</li> <li>3. Facilitates employer/employee access to job coaches and supported employment services</li> <li>4. Established decentralized rehabilitation services (client-centered approach using vouchers to obtain services from various private businesses, with services reviewed and paid for by the agency that oversees benefits)</li> <li>5. Requires that benefit recipients have a responsibility to work if offered a suitable job and allows them to develop their own rehabilitation plans</li> </ol>
Norway	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Offers limited wage subsidies for employers</li> <li>2. Instituted formal supported employment programs, as well as other specific job supports of beneficiaries, such as mentoring and job club</li> <li>3. Provides specific training supports for individuals with work limitations</li> </ol>
Sweden	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provides financial incentives to employers to hire individuals with disabilities (wage subsidies, development employment, secure employment, and sheltered employment)</li> <li>2. Manages sheltered employment through state-owned company</li> <li>3. Offers individuals funding for technical work aids and offers employers funding for special devices</li> <li>4. Promotes self-employment for unemployed individuals with disabilities through special supports</li> </ol>
United Kingdom	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Offers income support to workers with disabilities (such as through the Access to Work grant program)</li> <li>2. Shifting from sheltered employment (closing some of its state-sponsored factories) and toward supported employment (through a community jobs program and providing back-to-work and job search support)</li> </ol>

**Promoting supported employment over sheltered employment.** Few countries invest in the sheltered employment system, which is perceived by experts as promoting the segregation of individuals with disabilities from the open labor market (Ebersold 2008). As such, some countries that have traditionally operated sheltered employment programs have either shut them down over the years or are in the process of doing so. For example, during the 1980s and 1990s, Australia



required sheltered workshops to transform into supported employment programs (Tuckerman et al. 2012). More recently, in March 2012, the United Kingdom's national Department for Work and Pensions announced that it planned to close 36 of its 54 state-owned sheltered employment factories. As an alternative to the sheltered employment model, most countries are investing in a variety of supported employment programs. These programs emphasize integration into competitive employment through the use of employment supports. These supports may include work capability assessments; job search and placement assistance; job preparation (for example, vocational education and training); and job coaching. For example, Ireland and the Netherlands give workers access to job coaches or mentors who can help them learn the specific requirements of the job. Most of these countries' supported employment programs provide these supports long term to ensure that participants maintain employment.

**Financial incentives offered to employers.** Various countries have formulated financial incentives to encourage employers to hire people with disabilities. These incentives help to subsidize the cost of employing a person with reduced work capacity or the cost of creating a more accessible worksite. One popular form of financial incentive is the provision of wage subsidies to employers. Most countries weigh a variety of factors to determine the wage subsidy rate offered to an employer for their employees with disabilities, often in regard to the number of hours worked or work capacity. In Denmark, for instance, the subsidy covers one-third, one-half, or two-thirds of a worker's wages, up to an occupation-specific maximum. Ireland, through its wage subsidy scheme, sets a universal flat rate without regard for work capacity or the salary of the position. Countries also offer other financial incentives to encourage employers to hire people with disabilities. Australia allows employers to pay productivity-based wages to individuals with decreased work capacity, and Swedish employers can receive funding for special devices to better accommodate their workers with disabilities.

**Financial incentives offered to workers with disabilities.** In addition to granting financial incentives to employers to hire workers with disabilities, a few countries have instituted financial incentives to encourage individuals with disabilities to work or remain employed. Unlike other types of income support schemes, these financial supports allow individuals to remain employed. For example, the Netherlands offers a wage supplement to workers with disabilities who work at least 50 percent of their capacity. In addition, the United Kingdom offers an Access to Work grant to workers with disabilities so they may purchase items (such as special equipment) that will help them do their job.

**Financial incentives and mandates for vocational training.** Historically, vocational rehabilitation and training programs have provided supports to workers with disabilities to develop their skills and capabilities. Participation in these programs tends to be voluntary. However, some countries have used financial incentives to encourage participation in vocational rehabilitation and training programs, though the extent to which they encourage participation is unknown. For example, Germany (among others) offers various income supports to those engaged in vocational or educational training programs. In contrast, countries like Australia and the United Kingdom require income support beneficiaries to undergo vocational training in order to continue to receive a particular benefit. For example, the United Kingdom will automatically place all new recipients of national income support (Employment and Support Allowance) in a vocational training program after 13 weeks of receiving the benefit.

**Innovative policies that promote employment in selected countries.** Some countries use other approaches to promoting employment that are rarely seen elsewhere. For example, France and Germany have instituted quota systems for workers with disabilities, Germany and the Netherlands

offer vouchers (that is, a fixed budget for the individual to purchase services in the open market) to promote human capital and accommodations, and Ireland offers disability awareness training supports to employers.

## IV. PROGRAMS AND POLICIES TARGETED TO YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

This chapter focuses on youth-specific programs and policies that have been developed in other countries. Such programs could be more inviting to youth (as opposed to an impersonal “adult” provider, such as a job center) and better able to meet their needs. This may be important because youth and young adults face multiple issues with transition (regarding independence, autonomy, education, and social interactions) that are not present for older working-age adults and may need to be factored into the delivery of services. Funding these kinds of programs may indicate the importance a country places on promoting the independence of youth and young adults with disabilities. These programs also are embedded in a country’s larger system of work and educational supports, such as unemployment and tertiary education programs, which may need to be considered before applying these types of policies to U.S. programs. Table IV.1 summarizes the experiences of the countries under review. We document the key themes below.

**Table IV.1. Programs and Policies Targeted to Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities, by Country**

Country	Programs and Policies
Australia	1. Offers an income supplement to youth and young adults already receiving income support payments
Canada	1. Offers income support and tax credit to families that have youth with disabilities 2. Established national plan to improve employment of transition-age youth focused on youth with disabilities
Denmark	1. Guarantees unemployed young people an interview at a local job center, which helps identify schemes available to youth with disabilities 2. Empowers local services to examine youths’ or young adults’ situation and prepare them for future employment or education through the development of an education plan
France	1. Offers youth with disabilities practical vocational education and training opportunities, which are provided by either professional upper secondary schools or regional institutions of adapted education
Germany	1. Instituted vocational centers specifically for young adults with disabilities 2. Provides opportunities for young adults to have access to work trial experiences, with wages provided for a guaranteed period 3. Implemented various small projects/programs (targeted largely to employers) to improve the employment of young adults, including Job4000, incorporated training, mentoring programs, temporary work programs, and Jobs Without Barriers project
Ireland	1. Provides financial assistance for young adult disability beneficiaries to return to school
The Netherlands	1. Established youth-specific benefit program, Wajong, targeted to youth ages 17 to 30; reformed in 2010 to focus on employment, with separate schemes for those who can work, those who go to school, and those who are limited to benefits 2. Offers educational supports (for example, financing) to promote educational attainment
Norway	1. Established young disabled person benefit (income support) for individuals born with a disability or who acquire a disabling condition before age 26 to provide minimum financial support 2. Developed 2012 employment strategy for people with disabilities that targets young adults with disabilities, including new pilot projects, improved employer supports, and expanded services for youth with disabilities
Sweden	1. Offers income supports for young adults with disabilities (ages 19 to 29) engaged in a labor market program 2. Offers income support for young adults with disabilities who will not be able to work for at least a year
United Kingdom	1. Instituted a postsecondary school program that combines vocational training and independent living education

**Offering a youth-specific national employment strategy.** Norway has an overarching employment strategy for persons with disabilities with a strong focus on young adults (those under 30 years of age) (Norwegian Ministry of Labour 2012). This initiative includes funding for specific programs and pilot projects to address barriers that prevent young adults with disabilities from entering or keeping employment. It focuses on workers as well as employers, including measures such as (1) pilot projects to expand the role of employer subsidies for employment and workplace accommodations, (2) commitments to improve the administrative processing of employer claims for benefits associated with hiring people with disabilities, (3) establishing new mentoring programs for youth (also with employer subsidies), (4) establishing subsidized labor market programs (with a priority for young adults), (5) trainee programs for government employment, and (6) expanding the capacity of current work-experience programs for young adults. Canada's Youth Employment Strategy aims to provide youth who face barriers to employment with access to the information and training they need to enter the labor market (Service Canada 2012). Skills Link, one of the three programs offered under YES, focuses on improving the employment of youth with disabilities (among other groups). Skills Link provides funding to organizations to offer activities that address youth needs, including skills for employment, self-esteem, and work experience (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada 2009).

**Conducting many youth-specific pilot projects.** Germany has shown a commitment to promoting employment of young adults by pursuing a variety of pilot projects that involve, or largely involve, youth and young adults with disabilities. Jobs Without Barriers (*Jobs ohne Barrieren*) is a project begun in 2004 to help employers address accommodation issues that allow them to employ young adults with severe sensory or physical impairments. A mentoring program (*Mentoring-Programm für Studentinnen mit Behinderung*) targets female students with disabilities, encouraging them to complete college. These projects have tended to be small in scale, serving only a few youth or involving a small number of companies. The Netherlands is another country that has engaged in the implementation and evaluation of a large number of pilot projects; De Vos (2012) presents some of the initial results from selected projects. One such project is the Vangrail project, which focuses on delivering vocational services to high school dropouts with mild to moderate learning disabilities. With the capacity to serve 50 youth per year, about one-third have achieved employment outcomes as part of their involvement.

**Providing educational supports.** Many countries offer coordinated, comprehensive supports to promote the educational attainment of youth and young adults with disabilities. Ireland, for example, provides financial assistance for young adults on disability benefits to return to school through the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA). The BTEA is not means tested and includes an annual cost of education allowance paid at the beginning of the academic year along with a weekly standard payment. The scheme offers two paths for different levels of education and is available to beneficiaries of the disability allowance, invalidity pension, or incapacity supplement who are age 18 or over (Department of Social Protection 2013).

**Establishing youth-specific vocational programs.** Another approach is to develop vocational programs targeted to youth. Germany has youth-specific vocational centers, and its incorporated training project (*Verzahnte Ausbildung*) combines private enterprise with vocational rehabilitation, so that youth are employed by a business but paid by the vocational rehabilitation program, which also provides training and other supports. In Denmark, all unemployed youth and young adults, with or without disabilities, are guaranteed the opportunity to receive services from a Job Centre. The Job Centre develops an action plan with the youth and specifies the schemes or programs that are available to him or her, such as job training, flex jobs, or income support (Steen 2012).

**Providing income-support programs.** Rather than allow young adults with disabilities to enter into adult disability systems, as discussed in Chapter III, some countries have instituted disability benefit programs specifically for young adults. Such programs can better focus on rehabilitation and reintegration for this population, thereby avoiding their long-term receipt of disability benefits. One advantage of these programs is that they often are associated with a benefit-specific vocational component. Norway and Sweden both have such programs. The Netherlands recently instituted significant reforms to its program. Wajong, the young persons' disability benefit, is available to individuals who either had a work-impairing disability at age 17 or acquired one between ages 17 and 30 when they were students (or shortly after being students). In 2010, in response to rising beneficiary numbers, new beneficiaries were assigned to one of three support strategies, based on their capacity: (1) work (for those likely to return to work); (2) school (for those in school or returning to school); or (3) benefits (for those unable to work). Early assessment of the reform showed that most youth had been assigned to the work strategy, with just 13 percent in the benefit strategy, though the number in the latter strategy was expected to increase over time (Berendsen et al. 2011). As part of the program, young people receive participation plans that outline the supports they will receive to obtain their goals and access to vocational services. Beneficiaries also have an obligation to work, if offered a job.

**Providing income supplements.** Rather than offer a separate disability benefit program for youth, two countries, Australia and Canada, offer an income supplement in addition to an individual's receipt of other benefits. Income supplements represent a payment to offset the additional costs of having a disability. In Australia, for example, young adults (under age 21 or 22) who receive certain income support payments (such as the disability support pension) also receive a supplemental payment on the basis of their being youth.

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## V. POLICIES TO PROMOTE ACCESS TO ADULT SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

This chapter provides a summary of the policies enacted in other countries to help individuals with disabilities acquire adult services. These policies may not be specific to youth, as they enable all people with disabilities to obtain needed services and supports, although our emphasis is on identifying those that are most useful for youth with disabilities. Table V.1 provides an overview of our findings regarding such access. Most, though not all, countries in this review have policies to help promote access to adult services. We classify these policies in five categories, discussed below.

**Table V.1. Policies Promoting Access to Adult Services for People with Disabilities, by Country**

Country	Policies
Australia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Coordinates the income support and vocational support programs for adults with disabilities through national agency</li> <li>2. Removed waiting list for disability employment services so that individuals can receive immediate access to the service they require</li> </ol>
Canada	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Makes recipients of income support eligible for benefit-specific vocational rehabilitation program, which is based on contributions</li> <li>2. Provides funding to provinces to design programs that connect employers to persons with disabilities</li> </ol>
Denmark	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reorganized and reformed municipalities in 2007 and gave responsibility for active labor market policies to local job centers</li> <li>2. Allows recipients of income support (early retirement pension) to receive financial assistance for medical treatment and expenses</li> <li>3. Administers income support through local authorities, who also determine a beneficiary's eligibility for other supported employment schemes or rehabilitation programs</li> <li>4. Offers income support for individuals engaged in vocational rehabilitation services</li> </ol>
France	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Combined multiple income supports (human assistance, technical assistance, home and vehicle modifications, transportation expenses, assistive animals and other expenses) into one benefit</li> </ol>
Germany	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Offers income support for individuals engaged in vocational rehabilitation services</li> </ol>
Ireland	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Administers income support programs (disability allowance, among others) and an education allowance through one federal department</li> </ol>
The Netherlands	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Administers both the disability benefit programs and the provision of vocational supports through one federal agency</li> </ol>
Norway	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Offers income support for individuals engaged in vocational rehabilitation services</li> <li>2. Combined multiple income supports (rehabilitation, vocational rehabilitation, and time-limited benefits) into one benefit</li> </ol>
Sweden	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Monitors the efforts of municipalities to improve accessibility to disability services through an independent national organization</li> </ol>
United Kingdom	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Places employment support allowance beneficiaries into a vocational or support group after a 13-week claim assessment phase</li> <li>2. Requires new disability and other beneficiaries to participate in vocational service program (Pathways to Work)</li> </ol>

**Consolidated supports.** Rather than have a diverse array of programs and supports, some countries have worked to consolidate their supports, which could have the advantages of simplifying the administration of these supports and enabling consumers to better access the supports they need to live and work. France replaced its human assistance benefit program with a more expansive one that allows beneficiaries to receive compensation for human assistance, technical assistance, home and vehicle modifications, transportation expenses, assistive animals, and other expenditures.

Norway consolidated three of its income support programs (rehabilitation, vocational rehabilitation, and time-limited benefits) into a single benefit program.

**Coordinated benefits and services.** Several countries have instituted policies to improve the coordination of available supports. Two countries—Australia and the Netherlands—have combined multiple support programs under the domain of a single agency. Beginning in 2011, Australia’s Department of Human Services—which already managed the country’s national disability employment services program—began to also administer disability benefits. In the Netherlands, the federal social security agency administers disability benefits and supervises rehabilitation expenditures, which are contracted out to private rehabilitation service providers. This type of shift serves to make disability-related services a one-stop shopping experience, with individuals needing only one case manager or staff contact to help coordinate and explain different kinds of services and supports. This case manager may become a job coach, or mentor, when the people with disabilities under her care become employed. Denmark has implemented two policies that fall under this theme. First, the authority that administers the disability benefit also assesses a beneficiary’s eligibility for rehabilitation programs. Second, recent reforms have tasked local job centers with the responsibility of matching jobseekers with organizations that need employees and working with beneficiaries with disabilities to determine whether they qualify for employment support or training schemes.

**Income supports for vocational rehabilitation.** Denmark, Germany, and Norway provide income assistance for individuals accessing vocational rehabilitation services. Such supports allow individuals to maintain a standard of living and, perhaps, prevent automatic applications to the long-term disability program as a means to obtain an income.

**Monitored service access.** In Sweden, the Swedish Agency for Disability Policy Co-ordination (*Handisam*) monitors the effectiveness of its municipalities in promoting access to services. Handisam has engaged in a variety of projects to encourage access including annually publishing a report that ranks the accessibility of each state authority and recently producing a status report on how the municipalities are addressing the government’s priority areas for disability accessibility and policy. This work has the effect, perhaps indirectly, of promoting coordination of services and improving access for people with disabilities.

**Direct access to services.** Several countries have developed policies to promote automatic eligibility of or access to programs and services. Such policies have the effect of increasing access by minimizing the need to apply for services, improving the speed of service delivery, and emphasizing employment over benefits. As noted in Chapter III, in the United Kingdom, individuals who receive employment support benefits (a short-term sickness program) automatically are placed into a vocational activity or other support program after 13 weeks. Furthermore, new disability beneficiaries are required to participate in the Pathways to Work program to receive appropriate vocational services. Australia eliminated its waiting list for vocational services so that no applicants had to wait, thereby improving overall access to those services.



## VI. POLICIES PROMOTING COORDINATION OF THE TRANSITION FROM YOUTH TO ADULT SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

In this chapter, we identify policies that other countries have instituted to address issues related to transitioning from youth to adult services. Transitioning from one set of supports to another can be impeded by lack of coordination, differences in eligibility definitions, and lack of youth focus on the part of providers. Solutions to these problems that have been promoted in the selected countries focus on service coordination and transition planning, increased educational and vocational supports, and adjusted age requirements for services. Table VI.1 provides an overview of these specific policies, which we summarize below.

**Increased coordination of services.** Improving the coordination of services across multiple providers or agencies involves a policy approach that focuses on an entire network or system of organizations responsible for delivering transition services. In the Netherlands, recent reforms have included developing collective agreements among various constituents (local government, secondary schools, and employers) to help coordinate services that youth receive. The country has also tried to reduce the number of organizations involved in delivering services, placing increased responsibility on local governments to deliver or coordinate services.

**Improved transition planning efforts.** Another approach to promoting transitions to adult services is to increase the planning opportunities that are available to youth with disabilities. Denmark has promoted these types of activities in two ways. Youth who seek services from job centers can develop action plans to identify the services and supports that are available to them. The job center staff work with youth to develop the goals of the plans and the steps required to reach those goals. Then, staff follow up with youth to ensure they are participating in the plan. The Youth Education Guidance Service helps youth with an identified difficulty in completing their education to develop an education plan to achieve their education and employment goals, which can include teaching, training, and internships. In France, upper secondary school students have access to active guidance counseling to help them make informed choices of postsecondary education, future occupations, and career opportunities (OECD 2011).

**Increased supports for postsecondary education.** A recent OECD (2011) report summarizes current efforts to reduce barriers to better higher education outcomes for youth with disabilities. Policies that promote postsecondary achievement for this population include income and financing supports, services that bridge secondary and postsecondary education, extended periods to complete studies, improved admission and in-school supports, and improved knowledge of the needs of students with disabilities for completing postsecondary school. We highlight a few key policies in this area from the countries included in this review. Ireland and the United Kingdom provide educational allowances to individuals with disabilities who are enrolled in higher education programs, while Germany provides a cash benefit to secondary school students to help them in their transition to vocational programs. These types of benefits help to address the increased cost of postsecondary education for youth with disabilities. Germany, through its *Übergangssystem*, provides targeted vocational training for youth with disabilities. Norway allows students with disabilities additional time to finish postsecondary school without harming their financial support, and requires universities to develop transition plans for all students (not just those with special needs) to facilitate school completion. To facilitate institutional knowledge of the needs of students with disabilities, Ireland has implemented an advisor network to distribute relevant information to postsecondary institution staff.

**Table VI.1. Policies Promoting Coordination of the Transition from Youth to Adult Services for People with Disabilities, by Country**

Country	Policies
Australia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Instituted a national program to help youth with disabilities transition from school or the community into postsecondary education and strengthen the connections among participating organizations</li> <li>2. Allows youth to be eligible at age 16 for select income support benefits</li> <li>3. Funds employment programs for youth with disabilities no longer enrolled in school (some state governments only)</li> </ol>
Canada	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provides funding to employers and organizations to offer activities and support services to help youth with disabilities find employment</li> </ol>
Denmark	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Specifies that job centers develop action plans for unemployed young adults with disabilities to determine which income or vocational support schemes may be available to them</li> </ol>
France	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Encourages active guidance counseling for all upper secondary education students to help them make informed choices of postsecondary education, future occupations, and career opportunities</li> <li>2. Offers youth with disabilities practical vocational education and training opportunities that are provided by either professional upper secondary schools or regional institutions of adapted education</li> <li>3. Does not require a minimum age for eligibility for two of its supplemental disability support programs</li> </ol>
Germany	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Offers income supports to promote secondary school completion and transition to vocational education</li> <li>2. Provides targeted vocational training for transitioning youth with disabilities</li> </ol>
Ireland	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Offers means-tested income supports starting at age 16 (disability allowance)</li> <li>2. Offers education allowances for social welfare beneficiaries who are young adults</li> <li>3. Created knowledge network for postsecondary institutions to promote awareness of issues for students with disabilities</li> </ol>
The Netherlands	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Instituted collective agreements among secondary schools, employers, and national/local government agencies to coordinate education and employment services</li> <li>2. Reduced number of entities involved in delivering services to youth with disabilities and increased responsibilities of municipalities in delivering services</li> <li>3. Funds private rehabilitation providers to target transition-age youth through social security agency</li> </ol>
Norway	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Allows youth with disabilities additional time to complete postsecondary studies</li> <li>2. Requires postsecondary institutions to provide transition planning</li> </ol>
Sweden	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Does not have a minimum age requirement for its personal assistance support program</li> </ol>
United Kingdom	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Instituted a national program to improve and coordinate services for young people with disabilities transitioning into adult life</li> <li>2. Instituted an initiative to improve school-to-work transitions for young people with intellectual disabilities</li> <li>3. Operates a program to provide knowledge and support to local authorities and their partners to help young people with disabilities transition into adulthood</li> <li>4. As part of its current education reform, requires that education authorities institute a single process to assess education, health, social care, and employment support needs for youth with disabilities</li> <li>5. Implementing process for education authorities to improve access to better quality vocational and work-related learning options to enable young people to progress in their learning after age 16 and to coordinate the transition from children's to adult health services</li> <li>6. Does not have a minimum age requirement for its personal care assistance program</li> <li>7. Offers financial allowances to youth with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education</li> </ol>

**Increased vocational supports.** Several diverse policies promote connections to vocational supports for youth with disabilities, but many of these are small in scale. The United Kingdom instituted a three-year (2008 to 2011), cross-governmental project to help transition-age youth (ages 14 to 25) with severe learning disabilities achieve full employment and independence once they leave school. The initiative evaluated the current school-to-work transition process, identified transition barriers, and developed employment pathways for youth participants. In Australia, some state governments have funded programs to promote employment for youth with disabilities who leave school. In addition, Australia instituted the National Disability Coordination Officer Program, which primarily serves to assist and support students with disabilities to gain employment and independence after they graduate from secondary school.

**Expanded age requirements.** In addition to special benefit programs for youth, the age limitation to qualify for some benefits can be expanded—either raised, for benefits that are generally for those under the age of 17 or 18, or lowered, in the event of adult benefits. Germany allows continued child benefits (via a tax refund) for parents of youth up to age 25 when this group is in education or training programs; the credit is extended indefinitely when the child has a disability. Ireland offers its income support program to individuals at age 16.

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## **VII. CONCLUSIONS**

This report summarizes policies and programs of 10 OECD countries, in addition to the United States, aimed at improving the transition of youth with disabilities to appropriate and gainful employment. Although the evidence as to whether these policies and programs are effective is missing in most cases, they have the potential to offer promising ideas for implementation or testing in the United States. Although not directly transferable, these ideas, if proven effective, could give new impetus to reforming U.S. programs for more efficient, evidence-based transition options for this population. To conduct this study, we reviewed the literature available for Australia, Canada, and eight European countries: Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

In this chapter, we first highlight specific limitations in the U.S. system of benefits and services for youth with disabilities. Then, we identify promising international programs or policies that could address gaps in knowledge and provide initial lessons for the U.S. system using an in-depth case study approach.

### **A. Limitations of the U.S. System**

Although for nearly three decades U.S. public policy regarding youth with disabilities has moved toward greater inclusiveness and independence, existing policies cannot ensure that youth with disabilities have smooth transitions to adulthood, especially if they receive SSI or Social Security disability benefits. Furthermore, this population faces challenges related to health, social isolation, service needs, potential loss of benefits, and lack of access support. Potential solutions to overcoming these barriers to successful transition have been tested in several demonstrations sponsored by SSA, such as the YTD projects, or are planned to be addressed by new studies, such as PROMISE.

We built on previous studies in the United States to identify four sets of barriers that inhibit the access to supports that facilitate the transition from youth to adulthood by people with disabilities. As noted in Chapter I, the four overarching barriers are (1) insufficient employment supports, (2) few services targeted specifically to the needs of youth and young adults, (3) issues with access to adult services, and (4) insufficient coordination of the transition from youth to adult services.

To guide this study, we adopted a conceptual framework (see Chapter II), which depicts the linkages among these barriers, policies to address them, and the transition environment, which are relevant for both the United States and any other mature social welfare systems serving people with disabilities. This framework is sufficiently broad to guide the identification of promising efforts in any country for improving the well-being of this population in their transition into adulthood.

### **B. Promising International Policies That Address the Limitations of the U.S. System**

In this section, we organize our discussion around the sets of policies that could address the four barriers listed above. Within each of these groups, we then summarize the gaps in knowledge about these policies in the 10 OECD countries and the lessons that are most likely to benefit the United States.

## 1. Policies Promoting Employment for People with Disabilities

Both the United States and the other 10 OECD countries in this study have implemented numerous initiatives to link youth and adults with disabilities to employment supports. These have focused on both sheltered and supported employment (that is, employment in the open labor market). Furthermore, in the United States, there is consensus that many of these supports can be regarded as best practices for youth with disabilities. Despite this consensus regarding the effectiveness of these employment supports, youth with disabilities have limited connections to them while in high school and beyond. For instance, state vocational rehabilitation agencies are often an important resource for youth to obtain vocational services after high school, but not all agencies have resources to serve all youth with disabilities who would benefit from services.

Our review of the evidence from the 10 OECD countries revealed a wide range of efforts to address the following issues: the transition from sheltered to supported employment, the financial incentives offered to workers with disabilities as well as those tied to vocational training, and expanded employer supports. Many of these efforts have resulted in innovative policies that promote employment in some countries that were rarely seen operating elsewhere. For instance, Germany offers vouchers to youth with disabilities to purchase support services in the open market, whereas France has a worker disability quota system.

Despite the promise of many of the policies summarized earlier, it remains unclear whether these innovations could be implemented effectively in the United States. For example, U.S. policymakers may not be willing to mandate that employers hire a minimum percentage of employees with disabilities. Furthermore, although vouchers—fixed-budget instruments to promote human capital formation—have become popular and extensively tested in education services in the United States, little is known about when this type of financial incentive should be offered to increase participation in vocational rehabilitation and training programs. For instance, should vouchers be offered to support the transition from sheltered to supported employment? Or should vouchers be offered to those already engaged in supported employment? Without a better understanding of how the OECD countries chose whether and when to intervene to support youth with disabilities to gain employment, the prospects for using their experiences to inform policy in the United States regarding employment supports remain limited.

## 2. Policies Targeted to Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities

As noted in Chapter I, the United States has a paucity of programs and policies that focus on youth and young adults with disabilities. Although SSA has supported pilot studies that involve this population, most studies tend to be small in scale—that is, a handful of test sites with a few hundred participants each. Furthermore, there is limited evidence about the effectiveness of these pilots. In an environment where evidence-based policy is rapidly becoming the norm, these limitations make it challenging, if not impossible, to adapt the policy lessons from these studies on a national scale.

Our literature review revealed that, in at least three countries (Germany, Norway, and the Netherlands), investment in large-scale pilot projects has helped government agencies to quickly identify what works. Most of the pilots have been part of national youth-specific employment strategies looking for specific programs or program components that can be expanded nationally. These pilot projects are targeted to employers and youth who can work, those who go to school, and those who only receive benefits. Furthermore, there are efforts to provide income support and income supplements specifically for youth in vocational programs.

In the United States, national policymakers have been timid about developing a youth-specific employment strategy, and evidence about the effectiveness of this type of policy has been restricted to a set of small projects in multiple sites across the country. As a result, the lessons from several European countries developing and implementing national schemes to serve youth with disabilities could be valuable to the United States. However, because evaluations of the initiatives identified in our review are scant—available only in the grey literature, in government reports with restricted access, or in languages other than English—exactly how those experiences are relevant for the United States and how they might be implemented remain open questions.

### **3. Policies to Promote Access to Adult Services for People with Disabilities**

One of the most challenging aspects of the numerous programs that are available to promote access to adult services for people with disabilities in the United States is the lack of effective coordination across multiple government levels (national, state, and local). Furthermore, given the limited knowledge of the evidence of the effectiveness of these policies, it is unclear whether the uncoordinated initiatives that are in place actually improve outcomes for youth with disabilities who are in the process of transitioning to adult services.

Our literature review shows that most of the OECD countries in this study are operating programs at various levels of government that have been designed to improve the access to adult services for people with disabilities. These efforts have centered on consolidating supports; improving the coordination of benefits and services, typically under the oversight of a single agency; promoting automatic eligibility for or access to programs and services; and developing systems for monitoring the performance of local services.

Although the idea that central coordination of benefits and services for people with disabilities could address the fragmentation and limited coordination of programs in the United States is appealing, many aspects of how these programs achieve their goals are unknown. For instance, we found little information about the political process followed to achieve better coordination of services in countries such as Australia, Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands. In addition, it is unknown how the consolidation process was put in effect and whether it has generated improvements in the management of the benefits and services, and benefited people with disabilities while generating savings to government and society. In the United States, there are plans to address some of the larger issues of system coordination and funding with the PROMISE demonstration project, although it will be years before the results show whether the operation of consolidated systems yields real benefits.

### **4. Policies Promoting Coordination of the Transition from Youth to Adult Services for People with Disabilities**

In addition to the limited coordination of services of programs targeted to youth and young adults, there also is poor coordination of programs promoting the transition from youth to adult services with disabilities in the United States. This issue is particularly salient for youth who either do not receive transitional services in secondary school programs or cannot benefit from IDEA's mandates. These issues are compounded when youth can lose benefits if they do not meet eligibility requirements for adults *in the same program* (most notably, SSI).

All OECD countries in our review have actively pursued solutions to the problem of inadequate coordination of youth and adult services. Several of them have also increased linkages to postsecondary education, increased vocational supports, and revised age requirements for gaining

eligibility for disability benefits so that there is a continuum between youth and adult services. In addition to Germany and the Netherlands, the United Kingdom has strived to achieve this coordination. Many countries have also worked to improve transition planning services beyond secondary school, when transition planning ends for U.S. youth.

Despite the multiple coordinating efforts that the OECD countries have implemented, there are no far-reaching solutions to improve youth-to-adult transitions. As noted, there is little evidence of what steps the United States could take to address the coordination challenges for both accessing adult services and transitioning from youth to adult services. For instance, it is unclear whether raising the age limits for child SSI benefits, such as through a waiver of the age-18 redetermination process for youth in postsecondary education or vocational rehabilitation, is the way to proceed.

### **C. Countries with Promising Programs and Interventions for In-Depth Case Study**

Our literature review revealed that all of the 10 selected OECD countries, in addition to the United States, have made important progress in developing transition options for youth with disabilities. In particular, the numerous initiatives that the selected 10 OECD countries have developed and implemented over the past 30 years emphasize the importance of a detailed examination of the process by which programs and policies for achieving these goals originated or about the effectiveness of the most promising components.

We did not use formal criteria to select countries for in-depth examination. Instead, our selection rested on the feasibility of conducting these case studies within this study's time frame and budget. Our recommendations also focused on those countries whose policies for supporting the transition of youth with disabilities to adulthood seemed to be the most promising and more closely aligned with those in the United States. Given these considerations, in spring 2013, we conducted case studies on Germany and the Netherlands. A forthcoming report will feature selected programs in both countries, relying on expert input and further review of the supplementary materials.



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**APPENDIX A**  
**COUNTRY-SPECIFIC SOURCES CONSULTED**

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